

**ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE**

A network comprises a plurality of switching nodes interconnected by communication links for transferring digital packets. At least one switching node in the network pre-establishes a bypass virtual circuit through the network to bypass an element of the network, such as a switching node or a communication link, in the network. The bypass virtual circuit defines a path to another switching node in the network. The first switching node uses the bypass virtual circuit so constructed in forwarding of a packet in the event of a failure or other malfunction of the element if the first switching node would otherwise transfer the packet over that element.

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